

# THAIS ABANDONING HARD LINE ON REDS

Still Seeking Safe Borders,  
They Less Often Assert  
Support of U.S. Policy

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BANGKOK, Thailand, Feb. 15 — The American-supported South Vietnamese incursion into Laos has been met here with official silence that is a measure of how far Thailand has come from the time when she was one of the most vocal supporters of a hard line against Communism in Asia.

In private conversation, officials express their full approval of the attack on the Ho Chi Minh Trail network, but at the same time, they find the latest breach of Laotian neutrality a good occasion for applying a policy that a well-placed Foreign Ministry official called "de-emphasis on military cooperation with the United States."

While continuing, and in some ways stepping up, Thai participation in the war against the Communists in Indochina officials here have come to feel that since 1969 when President Nixon declared America's intention of significantly decreasing its role on this continent, Thailand's national interest is best served by a minimum of statements identifying Thai interests with those of the United States.

A Foreign Ministry official went so far as to question the wisdom of Britain's declaration defending the incursion into Laos. Not long ago this statement would have been acclaimed here as a normal statement from a member of the "free world."

The official said he thought it prejudiced Britain's credibility with the Communists in

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her capacity of co-chairman of the Geneva conference for the neutralization of Laos in 1962.

But the official did not deny recurrent reports that Thai soldiers have been participating in the fighting in Laos and Thai planes in the air war over northwestern Cambodia. He said that no "regular" Thai forces were engaged but that the Government had no way of preventing individuals who wanted to fight in Laos from doing so.

Knowledgeable observers see no contradiction in the continuing Thai military engagement across Thailand's borders accompanied by diplomatic policy designed to dissociate Thailand from the Indo-Chinese war.

## Borders Are the Goal

They believe that the Thai military effort supports the goal of keeping the border region free of Communist troops. The long-term diplomatic effort, guided by Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman, pursues the goal of achieving for Thailand a wider field of international maneuver than was possible throughout the nineteen-fifties and sixties, when her identification with the United States was nearly complete.

Responsible Thai officials are angered by charges from American Senators, news media and academics that Thais are opportunists who change sides when it is to their advantage. They contend that it is the United States that has changed its policies, in response to what the officials consider pressure on the Government from badly informed sectors of public opinion.

"The Nixon Doctrine is the opposite of what American policy was under Lyndon Johnson," an official said.

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